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ABSTRACT

In a questionnaire survey of all libraries in New York state and subscription agents used by them it was determined that libraries appear to know very little about what their subscription agents can be expected to do for them. The information collected in the survey is presented in tabular form and by type of library. The names and addresses of the subscription agents are presented with a description of types of materials, services rendered, business data (fees), and ratings by the libraries. The following recommendations are made: (1) that agents develop more efficient ways of claiming missing issues, (2) improvement of internal organization of the agencies, (3) development of more efficient handling of supplemental charges, (4) enhance cooperation between publishers and agents and (5) that regular personal contact be maintained between libraries and their subscription agents. (SJ)

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NEW YORK LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL SERVICES SECTION

Report on survey of subscription agents
used by libraries in New York State
conducted by the Technical Committee
in 1970

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I. Introduction

In a survey of U.S. subscription agents used by libraries in New York State for the acquisition of domestic serial titles, the Technical Committee sent out 1833 questionnaires to academic and research libraries and public, school and special libraries throughout the state. Six hundred and sixty libraries, or approximately one-third, replied to the questionnaire.

When the Technical Committee undertook this survey the plan was that it would be done in the following phases:

I. Questionnaires would be sent to all libraries in New York State.

II. Questionnaires would be sent to subscription agents used by libraries in New York State based on the statistics and comments of the libraries.

III. A report would be published on the results of the survey which hopefully would set down guidelines and serve as an aid to libraries in New York State in the acquisition of domestic serials and this report would be sent to all responding libraries and any other libraries requesting it.

The Committee wishes to express its appreciation to all of the libraries and subscription agents who participated in this project by answering the questionnaire and to the State Department of Education, the 3R's systems, and the 22 cooperative county library systems who helped in sending out this survey in their regular mailings and to Miss Marion Hogan and Miss Hazel Tchernoff who assisted in sending out the questionnaire and in typing the final report.

Technical Committee

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II. Results or findings by type of library participating in the survey.

The survey revealed that libraries appear to know very little about what their subscription agents can be expected to do for them.

In the following categories the questions were answered in different degrees of thoroughness and understanding:

1. Report on 2-3 year rates
2. Errors on annual list, including price and bibliographical information
3. Subscription prices including discount range and service charges

However, on the quality of service, libraries held very definite opinions from their rating on the total performance of the agent and their remarks concerning the agent or agents whom they used.

Therefore, the Committee found it practical in giving a breakdown by type of library to include only the number of libraries participating with the number of subscription agents used, the total number or percentage of titles held by the agent, and the service rating given to the agent by the library.

In order to get a total picture an overall tabulation follows the breakdown by types of library.

1. Academic and Research Libraries.

Eighty-two Academic and Research Libraries placed a total of 121 orders with eleven subscription agents. This figure of 121 orders indicates that 39 of the 82 libraries or approximately 50% chose to use more than one subscription agent for current periodical subscriptions. The 121 orders indicate that 63,224 or 76.5% of the total number of titles to which the libraries subscribed were placed with subscription agents. Of the 63,224 titles, 60,219 or 95 of the 121 orders were placed with four subscription agents.

Of the 121 orders placed by the 82 academic and college libraries answering the questionnaire, the libraries gave service ratings to the 11 subscription agents as indicated below:

No. of titles placed by agent	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
0-100	2	3		
100-200	1	4		
200-300	1	4	1	
300-400	2	13	2	1
400-500	4		4	1
500 +	14	39	11	6
	24	63	18	8

2. Public Libraries.

One hundred and thirty six libraries in this category answered the questionnaire. Thirty-six libraries placed their subscriptions directly with the publisher. One hundred libraries placed 149 orders with 22 subscription agents. This figure of 149 orders indicates that, as in the case of academic and research libraries, public libraries choose to use more than one subscription agent, i.e., 49 or approximately half of the 100 libraries use more than one subscription agent.

The 149 orders placed with subscription agents represent 28,353 or 66.4 of the total number of titles to which the libraries in this category subscribe.

1. The term "orders" used in the survey refers to the total account for groups of titles - rather than individual titles.

The 100 libraries replying to the questionnaire gave service ratings to their subscription agents as follows:

No. of titles held by agent	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
0-100	7	27	14	4
100-200	5	18	10	
200-300	4	10	6	1
300-400	1	1	1	
400-500	6		1	
500-1000	1	4	1	
1000-5000		5	2	
5000 +		5		
Total	24	70	35	5

Of the 28,353 titles placed with subscription agents, 19,530 or 68.8% of the titles were placed with three subscription agents

3. School Libraries.

Four hundred twenty school libraries placed 561 orders with 26 different subscription agents. One hundred and forty-one of the libraries chose to use more than one subscription agent.

The 561 orders represent 52,395 titles placed with subscription agents, with 5 subscription agents holding 45,632 or 87% of the titles.

The 420 school libraries answering the questionnaire gave service ratings to their subscription agents as indicated below:

No. of titles held by agent	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
0-100	79	213	33	5
100-200	34	63	12	6
200-300	13	19	14	3
500 +	1	12	-	1
	127	307	59	15

4. Special Libraries.

In this category, 22 libraries answered the questionnaire, 17 of them placing orders with 7 subscription agents and 4 directly with publishers. The 17 orders placed with subscription agents represented 5,512 or 57.3% of thetotal number of titles to which the libraries subscribe.

The 17 libraries gave service ratings to the 7 subscription agencies as indicated below:

Number of titles held by agent	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
0-100	1	3	3	
100-200		2	2	
300-400		1		
400-500				1
500 +		2	1	
	1	8	6	1

Subscription Agencies	TOTAL 1 % Titles with Agency	Till Forbid yes	Till Forbid no	Report on 2-3-year rates yes	Report on 2-3-year rates no	Agency Claims yes	Agency Claims no	2 % Errors on Annual List price inform.	2 % Errors on Annual List bibl. inform.	Subscription Prices 3 List price No discount No charge on total list	Discount Range	Service charge on % titles	Service charge on total list	4 Service Rating (Total performance) Exc.	Good	Fair	Poor
TOTAL number of agents used by libraries in New York	76.6 %	25.9 %	15.9%	17%	19%	63%		3.5%	4.3%	105	267	293	296	176 or 23%	448 or 58%	118 or 15%	29 or 4%
37		no response 58.2%		no response 44.9%													

Note: Please add any comments on the services of agents and any recommendations that you may care to make for the improvement of the services of subscription agencies on reverse of questionnaire.

For full explanation of Table and footnotes see page 8

Explanation and observations on tabulations of results of questionnaire

The statistics on the preceding chart are based on answers to the questionnaire of 620 libraries who placed 838 orders with 37 subscription agents. Although 660 libraries responded to the questionnaire, 40 of the libraries placed their domestic periodical subscriptions directly with the publisher. The survey reveals that 230 or 38.3% of the libraries chose to use more than one subscription agent.

1. Titles with agencies

   76.6% of all the domestic periodical titles to which the 620 libraries subscribe were placed with 37 subscription agents. Seven of the agents were used most frequently with 5 of these 7 agents holding 87% of the total number of titles and 13% being held by the remaining 31 agents.

2. Errors on Annual List

   Price Information - 3.5%
   Bibliographical Information - 4.5%

Usual error reported was small, but in both price and bibliographical information, libraries reported as high as 15 to 20% on annual list.

3. Subscription Prices

   The survey indicated that libraries were vague about subscription costs including service charges and discounts received from their subscription agents.

The figures or percentages listed under Subscription Prices are based on 838 orders placed by the 620 libraries. However, from the figures given it would not be realistic to try to arrive at an average cost as to discount or service charges which the agent charges on individual orders. The answers ranged from no charge to as high as 20%. Some libraries indicated "Yes" or "Various" in their answers.

4. Service Ratings

   The service ratings are based on 838 orders placed with subscription agents by the 620 libraries. Seven hundred and seventy-one of the orders were given service ratings.

III. Subscription Agents

Information included here based on replies to questionnaires sent to libraries and subscription agents

ANCORP NATIONAL SERVICES, Inc.
131 Varick Street
New York, N.Y. 10013
Types of material: Periodicals
Services: Reports on 2-3 year rates if requested, answers claims
Business data: No service charge, gives discount based on cost plus the publisher's price, invoices per instructions
Library Report: Of the 10 libraries reporting on the services of this agency, 5 gave a rating of good and 5 fair

EBSCO SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES
540 Granite Street, B
Braintree, Mass. 02184
Types of material: Periodicals, serials
Services: Subscriptions on a til forbid basis, answers claims and reports on 2-3 year rates if requested
Business data: Discount or service charge varies based on a given percentage markup over cost less retail price, invoices per instructions, supplemental charges billed on supplemental invoices, price charge not indicated unless requested
Library Report: Of the 61 libraries reporting on the service of this agency, 11 gave a service rating of excellent, 33 good, 14 fair, and 3 poor

F.W. FAXON COMPANY, INC.
15 Southwest Park
Westwood, Mass. 02090
Types of material: Periodicals, serials, documents
Services: Reports on 2-3 year rates, if publishers have such rates available, answers claims, accepts subscriptions on a til forbid basis
Business data: Service charge based on difference between publisher's discount, if any, and minimum profit, no discount, invoices per instructions, supplemental charges billed as they occur.
Library Report: Of the 105 libraries reporting on the services of this agency, 20 gave a rating of excellent, 63 good, 21 fair, and 1 poor

FRANKLIN SQUARE/MAYFAIR SUBSCRIPTION AGENCY
545 Cedar Lane
Teaneck, N.J. 07666
Types of material: Periodicals, documents, serials
Services: Answers claims, reports on 2-3 year rates
Business data: Service charge or discount based on the mix of titles the Library orders, invoices as instructed
Library Report: Of the 148 libraries reporting on the service of this agency, 23 gave a rating of excellent, 83 good, 33 fair, and 9 poor

INSTRUCTOR SUBSCRIPTION AGENCY
Danville
New York 11437
Types of material: Periodicals
Services: Reports on 2-3 year rates if requested, answers claims
Business data: No service charge, discount varies depending on the type of magazines included in the list, invoices per instructions
Library Report: Of the 52 libraries reporting on the service of this agency, 18 gave a rating of excellent, 28 good, 4 fair, and 2 poor

MacGREGOR SUBSCRIPTION AGENCY
Mount Morris
Illinois 61054
Preferred not to fill out questionnaire.
Questionnaire returned with covering statement "we are always willing to discuss such things as the need for service charges, discounts and other policy problems with our current and prospective customers. But, we are in no position to offer blanket statements on these factors for general publication." "Catalog gives all information necessary for a complete understanding of the entire scope of our services."

THE MOORE-COTTRELL SUBSCRIPTION AGENCIES, Incorporated
North Cohocton, New York 14868
Types of material: Periodicals and serials
Services: Subscriptions on a til forbid basis, answers claims, reports on 2-3 year rates if requested
Business data: Discount which varies according to listing and ranges from 0-15%, invoices per instructions, supplementary charges invoiced only after payments are processed to publishers, price changes indicated on annual invoice.
"If requirements of Library are weighted with Technical and Scholarly journals it may be necessary to add a service charge above the retail price."
Library Report: Of the 266 libraries reporting on the service of this agency, 93 gave a rating of excellent, 145 good, 27 fair, and 1 poor

STECHERT HAFNER, Inc.
31 East 10th Street
New York, N.Y. 10003
Types of material: Domestic and foreign periodicals, serials, documents
Services: Subscriptions on a til forbid or annual basis, answers claims, monthly newsletter on serials
Business data: Fully automated to (EDP) order processing and invoicing. Quotations and bids as required. Network of branch offices and agents throughout the world.
Library Report: Of the 18 libraries reporting on the service of this agency, 6 gave a service rating of excellent, 8 good, 2 fair, and 2 poor

TURNER subscription agency, incorporated
235 Park Avenue South
New York 10003, N.Y.

Types of material: Periodicals, serials, government publications -- domestic and foreign

Services: Subscriptions on a til forbid basis, annual renewal or upon receipt of order, answers claims

Business data: Discount or service charge based on a cost plus factor, invoices per instructions, supplemental charges or price changes billed to the Library upon receipt from the publisher

Library Report: Of the 10 libraries reporting on the service of this agency, 9 gave a service rating of good, and 1 poor

The following agencies were also listed in the survey as being used by more than one Library:

AMERICAN READERS SERVICE
BERNAN ASSOCIATES - Government Publication Service
CROWLEY SUBSCRIPTION AGENCY
CURTIS SCHOOL PLAN
DELONG AGENCY
LACOMBE AGENCY
LLEDS SUBSCRIPTION AGENCY
MAGAZINE SUPPLY HOUSE
HAROLD MANGER
POPULAR SUBSCRIPTION
READ-MORE PUBLICATIONS, INC.

The above list accounts for 20 of the 37 subscription agents being used by libraries in New York State. We have not included the other agents since they are listed by a single library and used primarily because they are conveniently located in the geographical area of that Library.

V. Recommendations

As a result of comments and requests by libraries and subscription agents in the questionnaire and suggestions made at the program meeting, the Technical Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. That subscription agents develop better and more efficient ways of claiming missing issues so that claiming can become the responsibility of the subscription agent rather than the responsibility of the library to claim directly to the publisher.

2. That subscription agents develop expeditious ways within the agency through the standarization of forms and procedures for handling correspondence, cancellations, and adjustments.

3. That the subscription agent develop more efficient ways of handling supplemental charges or "bill backs."

4. That cooperation and communication between publisher and subscription agent be achieved, possibly through the help of an outside organization or an association of subscription agents,and that solutions be sought to some of the following problems:

   a. A reduction of the time lag required for new subscriptions to become active.

   b. Common expiration date.

   c. Assurance that libraries receive all issues of a periodical to which they have subscribed. Publishers instead of extending subscriptions should answer claims and supply missing issues which libraries request.

   d. The handling of renewal of subscriptions automatically; possibility of a code being developed so that renewal notices could be sent to the agent and not to the library; that renewal of subscriptions not be treated as additional or new subscriptions.

   e. Possibility of arranging with publisher to order through subscription agent in those cases where the publisher requires that the subscription be placed direct.

5. That subscription agents make regular visits to their library customers or that they have area representatives. If they are unable to have area representatives, that they urge their customers to call them "collect" when they have an emergency or pressing problem.